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A Monumental Failure

Despite the denials of a high administration official that the Central Intelligence Agency did not err in assessing the Cuban situation, the facts are quite clear that it did make a grievous mistake. The CIA not only failed to properly evaluate the Cuban rebels' chances of successful landings, it also failed President Kennedy and placed him in a most embarrassing position, both domestically and internationally.

At the time of the attack on Cuba by the forces seeking to overthrow Fidel Castro's Communist government, it was generally thought with good reason—that the United States government had no part in the action, other than having provided a haven for some of the exiled Cubans engaged in the revolt. In response to a note from Russian Premier Khrushchev, Mr. Kennedy declared this nation's moral support for the Cuban patriots, but implied that the United States was not involved actively.

This implication appeared to have been reiterated by another statement by Mr. Kennedy that "any unilateral American intervention, in the absence of an external attack upon ourselves or an ally, would have been contrary to our traditions and to our international obligations."

In light of subsequent developments, it is clear that the President did not mean precisely what many thought he meant—that this country had not fostered and supported the Cuban attack on Castro. But at the time of his pronouncements, most Americans and much of the free world, at least, seemed to prefer such an interpretation.

Last Friday, the secrecy with which the CIA has attempted to cloak itself was rudely ripped apart by the revelation that this country had trained and equipped the Cuban patriots and had given them permission to attack.

The question here is not whether the United States should have actively assisted the rebels, for we believe that it was right in doing so. Certainly it is no more wrong for this nation to train and equip fighters for freedom than it is for Russia to train and equip fighters for communism.

The question is: How and why did the CIA fail to keep its operations secret? The President obviously trusted the CIA or it is not likely that he would have risked making statements implying that this country was not actively participating in the Cuban uprising. As a result of the loss of secrecy, the rug has, in effect, been pulled from under the President.

The fact that the CIA role was exposed by a newspaperman makes this failure even more disastrous. The reporter, of course, had access to a "leak" or confidential source of information inside CIA—an agency in which there are not supposed to be any leaks.

If a newspaperman can acquire such information, what can Russian counterespies in this country dig out of CIA? The thought is chilling, but it must be faced. The confidence of everyone in the vaunted CIA has been damaged badly and only a thorough overhaul of the agency—and time to see if such a shake-up has been effective—can restore public faith in this all-important operation.